

**TECHNICAL REPORT**  
**A Survey of Bullying Behavior Among Maine Third Graders**

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**Introduction**

How often do primary grade children report being bullied by their classmates? The purpose of this study was to discover the answer to this question by surveying third graders attending Maine's public schools. Even a cursory review of published research on bullying activities shows that bullying behavior is extensive in the United States public schools. In many studies both boys and girls of many grade levels report having been bullied, and the severity of bullying ranges from isolated incidents to chronic victimization, and causes and effects of bullying are varied. For instance, Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler (1992), in their study of 207 mid-western middle and high school students, found that 14% of their adolescent respondents reported that they had been severely victimized when bullying was defined as chronic victimization. Another study, by Perry, Kusel, and Perry (1988), found that 10% of American boys and girls, ages 9-12, were victims of extreme bullying. In 1996, Garrity and others found that, on the average, two to three students in every elementary classroom spent their day afraid of others, and consequently, avoided public places such as the cafeteria, restrooms, and hallways. Likewise, Shelly (1985) found that 80% of high school students and 90% of elementary and middle school students reported being bullied at school. Other studies show that bullying behavior causes serious distress to the victims and negatively affects learning (Hoover and Oliver, 1996). Furthermore, studies relate young peoples' bullying to future commissions of violence. A recent study (Colvin, Tobin, Beard, Hagan, and Sprague, 1998) brought forth evidence that children who display bullying behaviors often grow up to become perpetrators of violence. Finally, the current research points out considerable evidence that bullying occurs in the public schools in varying degrees of seriousness and frequency.

### **Methodology**

Given these findings from national studies, the purpose of this study was to discover the frequency of bullying activities among third graders in Maine. In association with the Maine Department of Education, the Maine Project Against Bullying recently invited all Maine public schools that had third graders to participate in a survey. Usable data from 127 schools was analyzed. This reflected a total of 4496 surveys that were completed by Maine third graders in January, 1999. This response totaled 28% of all third graders in the state. A copy of the survey appears in Appendix A. The directors of the Maine Project Against Bullying requested the Center for Educational Policy, Applied Research, and Evaluation at the University of Southern Maine to analyze the survey results and to prepare this summary report. In the text that follows, some analyses are based on fewer than 4496 respondents, depending upon the number of third graders who responded to specific survey items.

The survey asked third graders several questions related to bullying. Bullying was described in the following ways: (1) teased in a mean way, (2) called hurtful names, (3) left out of things on purpose, (4) threatened, (5) hit or kicked or pushed. In order to describe how much bullying goes on, and to ascertain the effects of the bullying, survey results were analyzed according to their relevance to the following questions:

- How do children feel at their schools regarding safety and happiness?
- How often are children bullied?
- How often do children bully others?
- Who does the bullying?
- How do children react to the bullying and what happens then?

The results were also analyzed according to some or all of the following divisions: state totals, school sizes, gender, and county. School sizes were defined as very small (less than 100 students), small (101-250 students), medium (251-450 students), and large (more than 450 students). It is necessary to note that when results were obtained from divisions of county and school sizes, percentages sometimes reflected very small numbers of respondents. The reader should keep this important limitation in mind when reviewing the findings reported here.

### Findings

**Question 1: How do third grade children feel at their schools regarding happiness and safety?**

Answer: Table 1 reports that a total of 1948 third grade students, or 44.3% of 4496 students, said they felt “very happy and good” about being at their school. Girls (47.5%) were more likely than boys (40.9%) to answer “very happy and good”. Those third grade children who answered “very sad and unhappy” to the question shown in Table 1 numbered 74, or 1.7% of all surveyed students. Boys were more likely than girls to report this. Forty-four boys, or 2.0% of all boys surveyed, felt “very sad and unhappy” while 28, or 1.3% of all girls surveyed, reported this.

Table 1: This is How I Feel Being at My School - State Totals

Categories	State Totals	
	Percent	Number
Very happy and good	44.3	1948
Sometimes happy and good	30.0	1320
So-so	19.4	853
Sometimes sad and unhappy	4.6	204
Very sad and unhappy	1.7	74

Although no relationship was found between school sizes and third graders’ feelings at school, the percentages of children who reported feeling “very happy and good” were slightly higher in larger schools, as shown in Table 2. Also, when combining results from two categories, the survey results showed that larger schools generally had a lower rate (5.8%) of third graders who were “sometimes sad and unhappy” or “very sad and unhappy”, while very small schools reported a rate of 8.1%. Small and medium-sized schools reported 6.5% each. (Note: The reader should consider that divisions by school sizes resulted in very small numbers of the respondents in certain question categories. For example, the numbers of “large” schools. Therefore, some results may reflect specific school buildings cultures rather than reflect typical very small or large schools.)

Table 2: This Is How I Feel Being at My School - by School Sizes

Categories	School Sizes			
	Very Small (< 100)	Small (101 - 250)	Medium (251 - 450)	Large (> 450)
Very happy and good	43.6	42.8	43.9	46.5
Sometimes happy and good	28.5	30.6	29.9	29.9
So-so	19.8	20.1	19.8	17.9
Sometimes sad and unhappy	6.4	4.7	4.9	3.7
Very sad and unhappy	1.7	1.8	1.6	2.1

Tables 3 and 4 report children's perceptions about their safety. Results reported in Table 3 reveal that most children felt very safe in places that are normally under much adult supervision. For instance, 76.2% reported feeling very safe in the classroom, 66.2% in the lunch room, and 60.0% in the hall. However, children reported feeling very unsafe in different places. Sixteen percent of all children felt very unsafe while walking to and from school, 9.5% while on the bus, 8.1% while at the bus stop, and 7.1% felt very unsafe while on the playground.

Table 3: This is How Safe I Feel in Each of These Places - State Totals

Places	Very Unsafe		Kind of Unsafe		So-so		Kind of Safe		Very Safe	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
In my classroom	1.1	49	2.3	303	6.5	283	13.9	601	76.2	3307
On the playground	7.1	303	12.3	530	22.5	966	30.6	1317	27.5	1181
In the lunchroom	1.4	59	3.3	139	12.0	511	17.2	733	66.2	2823
Walking to/from school	16.0	329	10.3	212	15.7	322	18.0	370	39.8	816
In the bathroom	5.2	218	5.8	244	16.7	704	16.4	694	55.9	2362
In the hall	2.8	117	5.3	224	14.1	593	17.8	748	60.0	2519
On the bus	9.5	356	10.4	391	17.6	662	20.4	768	42.1	1584
At the bus stop	8.1	275	7.6	257	12.4	420	15.7	534	56.2	1907

There were no large differences reported by boys and girls in terms of how safe they felt in the classroom, the lunchroom and the bathroom, places usually supervised by adults. However, boys and girls did report some differences in places where there was normally less adult supervision or fewer adults. For instance, more boys (75.7%) than girls (70.2%) said they felt very safe or kind of safe in the halls; 57.4% of boys versus 51.4% of girls reported feeling very safe or kind of safe at the bus stop; 28.7% of boys versus 24.0% of girls reported feeling very safe or kind of safe while walking to or from school.

Table 4 shows relative degrees of children's feelings of safety according to school sizes. From very small, to small, to medium and large-sized schools, the percentage of children who reported feeling very unsafe or kind of unsafe decreased from 15.6% to 12.3%, while the percentage of children who reported feeling very safe or kind of safe increased from 69.5% to 73.0%.

In general, third graders in Maine reported feeling safe and happy in their schools. While there were 74 (1.6%) children who said they were very unhappy and 49 (1.1%) who reported feeling very unsafe while in their classrooms, the overwhelming majority reported feeling happy and good and safe in their schools.

Table 4: This is How Safe I Feel at My School - by School Sizes

Categories	School Sizes - Average Percents			
	Very Small (< 100)	Small (101 - 250)	Medium (251 - 450)	Large (> 450)
Very Safe	51.8	52.6	54.1	52.9
Kind of Safe	17.7	18.2	18.4	20.1
So-so	14.9	15.2	14.4	14.7
Kind of Unsafe	7.7	7.4	6.6	6.7
Very Unsafe	7.9	6.6	6.5	5.6

### **Question 2: How often are children bullied?**

Answer: Survey results, as shown in Table 5, revealed that most children experience only milder forms of bullying, such as teasing, on a very infrequent basis. For instance, 55% said they were teased in a mean way

## Appendix 1

one or two times a year or never, 56.7% said they were called hurtful names one or two times a year or never, and 61.4% said they were left out of things on purpose one or two times a year or never. The same holds true for more serious bullying acts, such as being threatened or being hit, kicked, or pushed. For instance, 72.9% said they were never or almost never (one or two times a year) threatened, 58.4% said they were never or almost never (one or two times a year) hit, kicked or pushed.

Thus, many third graders reported being bullied on an infrequent basis. However, almost one in four reported being frequently threatened, and one in three reported being frequently hit, kicked, or pushed by schoolmates. As shown in Table 5, a total of 1017 third graders, or 22.6%, reported that they were threatened either everyday, or one or two times a week or month. Boys (25.3% of boys) were more likely than girls (22.1% of girls) to be threatened everyday, or one or two times a week or month.

When reporting more extreme bullying, 37.5%, or 1684 third grade students said that they were hit, kicked, or pushed everyday, or one or two times a week or month, while 58.5% (2624) reported that this happened to them either once or twice a year or never. Boys (56.5%) were more likely than girls (65.4%) to be hit, kicked, or pushed on such an infrequent basis.

Table 5: How Often Have Children Been Teased or Bullied at School? - State Totals

How often bullying happened	Teased in a mean way	Called hurtful names	Left out of things on purpose	Threatened	Hit, or kicked, or pushed
Everyday, or One or Two Times a Week or Month	40.7 (1,828)	40.0 (1,800)	34.3 (1,541)	22.6 (1,017)	37.5 (1,684)
One or Two Times a Year or Never	55.0 (2,473)	56.7 (2,547)	61.4 (2,762)	72.9 (3,276)	58.4 (2,624)

When the results were analyzed according to school sizes, findings showed that students from larger schools reported fewer occurrences of both milder bullying, (being teased, called names or left out on purpose) and more serious bullying (being threatened or hit, picked or pushed). For instance, Table 6, on the next page, shows that approximately one fourth of students from medium-sized schools (251-450) reported having been threatened on a frequent basis, while only about 18% of students from large schools

reported this. Findings also showed that students from very small (<100) schools reported the highest frequency of being hit, kicked, or pushed, while students from large schools, again, reported the lowest frequency. Conversely, the most infrequent occurrences of being threatened were reported by students in large schools. Also, students in large schools reported the most infrequent occurrences of being hit, kicked or pushed.

Table 6: Bullying Activities - by School Sizes

Size	Everyday, 1-2 Times a Week or Month			1-2 Times a Year or Never		
	Teased/Called names/Left out	Threatened	Hit/ Kicked/ Pushed	Teased/Called names/Left out	Threatened	Hit/ Kicked/ Pushed
<100	49.7	20.2	45.1	45.5	75.1	49.7
101-250	40.3	23.2	39.3	55.9	71.8	57.2
251-450	38.2	24.8	38.5	57.6	71.2	57.0
>450	34.0	17.7	31.3	62.7	78.0	65.0

Table 7, on the next page, shows the findings regarding bullying activities by counties. When county results were analyzed regarding how many children were hit, kicked, or pushed often (everyday, one to two times a week or month), the findings revealed a range of 30.6% in Sagadahoc County to 52.8% in Washington County. Knox reported the highest percentage of children who said they were hit, kicked, or pushed least often (either never, or only one or two times a year). The highest percentage of children who reported having been threatened everyday, or one or two times a week or month, were from Piscataquis County, while Franklin County reported the lowest percentage. Franklin also reported the highest percentage of children who said they were never threatened, or were only threatened one or two times a year. Once again, readers should exercise caution against making far-reaching comparisons among county findings. Without further statistical analysis, valid comparisons are limited because of small numbers of respondents in some categories. Therefore, generally speaking, results revealed that while children experienced bullying activities, most reported that they experienced only milder forms on a very infrequent basis.

Table 7: Bullying Activities by Counties

County	Everyday, 1-2 Times a Week or Month			1-2 Times a Year or Never		
	Teased/Called names/Left out	Threat-ened	Hit/ Kicked/ Pushed	Teased/Called names/Left out	Threat-ened	Hit/ Kicked/ Pushed
Androscoggin	35.1	23.3	34.2	60.1	71.1	61.5
Aroostook	41.3	25.9	44.6	53.4	68.0	49.3
Cumberland	36.5	19.3	31.0	59.3	75.3	63.2
Franklin	40.9	15.1	45.3	53.4	79.2	50.9
Hancock	42.6	29.8	37.2	56.4	68.1	58.5
Kennebec	34.2	18.4	34.8	62.7	78.1	62.1
Knox	36.6	25.8	32.5	60.5	69.5	64.2
Lincoln	41.8	20.3	33.6	55.6	77.6	63.8
Oxford	47.4	28.1	43.9	48.5	66.3	50.2
Penobscot	41.6	24.4	43.0	54.2	71.1	53.8
Piscataquis	39.7	32.6	41.5	53.1	62.2	54.1
Sagadahoc	36.9	19.6	30.6	57.9	75.3	62.1
Somerset	36.5	21.0	40.7	60.5	76.0	57.5
Waldo	37.2	20.5	39.7	57.9	73.7	55.8
Washington	47.2	27.8	52.8	48.2	66.7	38.9
York	36.7	23.0	38.3	60.1	73.3	58.8
Average	39.51	23.43	38.98	56.36	71.97	56.54

**Question 3: How often do children bully others?**

Answer: When children were asked how often they said mean things, teased, or called others names, more than three-fourths of children said they did this only one or two times a year or never. However, when asked how often they hit, kicked or pushed other children, 14.3% (645) of third grade respondents



reported having done this at least one to two times a month, as shown in Table eight. Approximately eighty-three percent of children said they never did this, or only did it one or two times a year.

Table 8: How Often Do You Hit, Kick, or Push Other Children? - State Totals

	Everyday, 1-2 Times a Week or Month		1-2 Times a Year or Never	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Said mean things	794	17.7	3,538	78.7
Teased others	628	14.0	3,639	80.9
Called others names	622	13.8	3,620	80.5
Hit, kicked or pushed	645	14.3	3,761	83.7

Table 9 shows the percent of third graders from different school sizes who admitted to having “hit, kicked, or pushed other children” everyday, or one or two times a week or month. Third graders from schools with populations over 450 reported that they engaged in the least amount of frequent hitting, kicking, or pushing of other children, as shown in Table 9. Further analysis also showed that almost twice as many boys (19.7%) as girls (9.2%) reported that they frequently (everyday, one or two times a week or month) bully other children.

Table 9: How Often Do You Hit, Kick, or Push Other Children? - by School Sizes

School Size  Total School Enrollment per School	State Totals		
	Everyday, one or two times a week or month	One or two times a year or never	Total Number of Students
<100	16.8	79.2	173
101-250	13.6	84.4	1,342
251-450	15.6	82.4	1,646
>450	11.7	86.9	939

**Question 4: Who does the bullying?**

Answer: Of those children who answered “yes” to having been bullied, teased, or that someone had tried to hurt them, they most often said “a boy”. As shown in Table 10, on the next page, approximately 50 percent of respondents reported that a boy had tried to hurt them. A category of “groups of girls” (5.9%) was least likely to be reported as one who tried to hurt them.

Table 10: At School, Who Has Bullied You? - State Totals

Category	Total Percents				
	Boys & Girls	Group of Boys	A Boy	Group of Girls	A Girl
Bullied you	12.7	23.7	40.6	8.3	14.6
Said mean things	19.4	15.1	36.8	7.4	21.3
Teased you	18.3	16.7	38.8	7.9	18.3
Called you names	19.3	15.6	38.2	7.5	19.4
Tried to hurt you	11.0	22.7	49.2	5.9	11.2

From Table 11 we can see a difference between genders when children named the perpetrator(s). A higher percentage of boys (30.1%) than girls (18.9%) reported being bullied by a boy, while a higher percentage of girls (13.2%) than boys (4.8%) reported being bullied by a girl. Similarly, a higher percentage of boys (24.7%) than girls (15.0%) reported a boy tried to hurt them, while a higher percentage of girls (5.9%) than boys (3.2%) reported a girl tried to hurt them.

Table 11: At School, Who Has Bullied You?- Gender

Category		Total Percents				
		Boys & Girls	Group of Boys	A Boy	Group of Girls	A Girl
Who bullied you	boy	7.0	17.7	30.1	5.1	4.8
	girl	8.5	11.0	18.9	4.9	13.2
Who tried to hurt you	boy	4.7	12.7	24.7	2.7	3.2
	girl	4.3	5.6	15.0	2.1	5.9

Generally speaking, when children reported about those responsible for milder as well as more serious bullying acts, they most often said that “a boy” had committed the offense.

Table 12 shows that the bully was also most often reported as being from a higher grade. This was reported by 42.3% of all third graders surveyed who said they had been bullied.

Table 12: At School, Who Has Bullied You?- Grade Level

Grade Level	Same Class	Different Class of Same Grade	Lower Grade	Higher Grade
Bullied by Kids (by grade level)	24.3	24.2	9.2	42.

**Question 5: What do children do when they are bullied and what are the results of their actions?**

Answer: When confronted with bullying, 91.3% of all third grade children do something. Table 13 shows that most children (44.6%) tell an adult, followed by 34.2% who tell the bully to stop, and 32.0% who get away from the bully. Others tell a friend (24.0%). Those who react by staying home from school total 3.4%, while 2.1% of third graders react by hurting others.

Table 13: What Do Children Do When They Are Bullied?

When I'm bullied, I:	Percents
Tell the bully to stop	34.2
Get away from the bully	32.0
Hurt other kids	2.1
Stay home from school	3.4
Tell an adult	44.6
Tell a friend	24.0

Table 14, on the next page, shows the different reactions boys and girls had when they were bullied. Of those who reported they were bullied, most notable is the fact that boys, much more than girls, were most likely to hurt others after being bullied.

Table 14: What Do Children Do When They Are Bullied?- by Gender

	Boy	Girl	Total Percent of All Students Surveyed
Tell to stop	49.9	48.8	34.2
Get away	50.9	47.7	32.0
Hurt others	84.4	15.6	2.1
Stay home	48.0	49.3	3.4
Tell adult	46.8	51.5	44.6
Tell friends	47.5	50.9	24.0

As shown in Table 15, those students who had been bullied reported that when they told someone about the bullying, 48.2% said “it got better”. However, it is noteworthy that another 37% of the third graders reported that nothing changed when they told someone or that the bullying got worse.

Table 15: If You Have Been Bullied,  
What Happened After You Told Someone? - State Totals

Response	Percent
It got better	48.2
It got worse	15.3
Nothing changed	21.7
I never told anyone	5.9

## Summary

In light of the recent commissions of violence by school children and youth against their peers, the American people are becoming very introspective about the culture of children and the larger society. In this context, an understanding of hostile acts by elementary school children helps to reveal important and timely information about Maine children. While further research is necessary to construct profiles of the “typical” bully, and to develop an understanding of the culture within particular schools that work effectively to reduce bullying, the recent survey of 4496 of Maine’s third graders reveals the following important findings:

- Approximately 75% of the children reported feeling very happy or sometimes happy at school, while a much smaller percent (6.3%) said they felt very sad or sometimes sad at school. Most children reported feeling very safe at school, especially in places where adult supervision occurs.
- Most children experienced only mild forms of bullying, such as teasing, on an infrequent basis. However, more than one-third reported being hit, kicked or pushed on a frequent basis.
- Most children reported that they do not bully others. When asked how much and how often they bully others, approximately 14% of third graders admitted to having hit, kicked or pushed others on a frequent basis; however, more than 83% said they never, or almost never, did this.
- Generally speaking, both boys and girls reported that it is a boy who is most often responsible for committing bullying. Also, the bully is most often from a higher grade.
- In response to bullying acts, almost all (91.3%) of third graders take some action: almost one-half tell an adult, followed by one-third (34.2%) who tell the bully to stop and who get away from the bully (32%). Although a very small percentage (2.1%), some children, when confronted with bullying, will hurt others. Finally, one-half of children perceive that the result of their having reported bullying is an improvement of the situation.

In conclusion, we see that Maine's third graders, though mostly happy and feeling safe in schools, experience varying degrees of bullying behavior. Many experience some form of bullying on an infrequent basis, but approximately one-fourth or more report being threatened or hit, kicked, or pushed. It appears that Maine's third graders, like many elementary children across the country, are victims of some type of bullying. In addition, approximately 14% of Maine's young children report they bully others, and of those bullied who report instances to others, approximately one-third report that the situation does not improve. Thus, the data from this survey sample of Maine's third graders suggest some actions are needed to insure that all young children in Maine's schools feel safe and secure in our schools.

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